

LEAPING LIZARDS! IT'S ...

JEAN-CLAUDE VAN DAMME

It's been a long hard road to the top for Jean-Claude Van Damme. Along the way he has driven taxis, thrown people out of nightclubs, delivered pizzas, and – wait for it – been married three times!

How does the son of a Belgian florist become a movie star in Hollywood?

A question of will. At 11 I was underweight and too sensitive. My father had me learn karate to form my character. By the time I was 13 I wanted to become a star. Later I opened a work-out hall in Brussels and was earning good money, but I knew deep down that I was worth more.

Have you always been so confident?

Yes. When I was 16 I went to a film festival in Italy, bothering producers to give me their cards. I even told them that I'd become a big star and that they'd do well to notice me. It made them laugh.

What was your next move?

I flooded Hollywood with my photos and clippings from karate publications.

to this country with 20 dollars in your pocket, you built an empire. I only have five dollars but I can act. I am good and I am not expensive. Give me a contract and you'll earn yourself a fortune!'

Then what did you do?

(laughs) I took off my shirt and flexed my muscles! I spread my legs wide between two chairs. He enquired whether I had a lawyer and working papers and, since I had learned long ago that in Hollywood if you don't know how to lie you'll never make it, I bluffed him and eventually walked out of his office with a contract in my pocket.

The only one to answer me was Kirk

Douglas. He wrote: 'If you really believe in it, you'll make it. Good luck!'

I packed, took along my savings, and left. It was 1981 and I was 19. I had no papers and didn't speak a word of English. I was a kind of kamikaze, sure of my mission, and nothing could stop me. I was cunning but naive.

What happened when you arrived in Hollywood?

I rented myself a car and slept in it for a month and a half. During the day I used to practice to stay fit, and visited production companies. To make ends meet I did it all – pizza delivery boy, taxi driver, nightclub bouncer. That lasted five years.

When did it all fall into place?

My meeting with Chuck Norris. He knew I was into karate but was still cautious with me. I gave him a demonstration and he immediately hired me to train him. That lasted eight months.

My real break came through my encounter with the producer Menachem Golan. We met by chance outside a restaurant. The next morning I hit his office and he saw me after an eight-hour wait! I told him: 'Menachem, you came

Were you an immediate hit?

The first edit of my first movie was a tragedy and I had to re-edit it in secret at night. That movie cost a million dollars to make and grossed 45 million dollars. After that I signed up for eight more low-budget movies.

So how much do you earn now?

I am now worth four million dollars per picture and the next one, *Double Impact*, is produced by Michael Douglas.

Do you ever get homesick?

Yes. It's here in America that money should be earned and there that one should live. The North Sea and its vast sandy beaches, the wind, the beer – I often think about it. I'll probably keep my home here and settle in Monte Carlo. Prince Albert (*ruler of Monaco*) told me, 'Jean-Claude, just give me a phone call and I'll arrange it all'.

Interview: © Dany Jucaud/Gamma/Scope Features

... AND HERE'S A PEEK AT HIS BRAND NEW FILM!

● In *Double Impact* Jean-Claude plays twin brothers Chad and Alex, who team up to reclaim their inheritance from the men who killed their parents.

● Alex has a few pervy scenes in the film with Danielle (played by Alonna Shaw).

● But most of the time he's just biffing and bashing bad guys like this one...

● And this one, too!